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THE PSYCHOLOGY OF FOOTBALL.

By Professor G. T. W. PATRICK, University of Iowa.

The ethics of football is a well worn theme; not so its psychology. It may be hoped that there will not be so much disagreement about the latter as there is about the former. A pessimistic writer in the *Contemporary Review* finds the English people on the verge of ethical pandemonium owing to the debasing influences of football. Teams advertise for players and buy them like chattels. Players sustain permanent physical and moral injuries. The spectators, under the excitement of a great game, become hoodlums, exhibiting violent partisanship and gross profanity, bestowing idiotic adulation upon the victors and heaping abuse upon the referee, restrained oftentimes only by the players themselves from inflicting upon him actual bodily injury. But a writer in the *Forum* finds in football a humanizing and elevating agency, "a school of morals and manners." It cultivates temperance and self-control, vigor and agility of body, quickness of perception, readiness of resource, manly courage, skill in planning, obedience, co-operation, *esprit de corps*. In the crowd of forty thousand spectators, we see an orderly, well-dressed, cultivated mass of humanity, composed of brave young men and beautiful young girls, innocently witnessing a contest whose issue is known to depend upon the temperance, bravery and self control of the player.

There is apparently a slight difference of opinion here. The present writer, however, is for the moment as indifferent to the good or evil of football as the seismologist is to the ethics of the latest earthquake; but he finds in the phenomenon of football itself the opportunity of the psychologist and the sociologist. It would, indeed, be a valuable contribution to these sciences if we could discover the motives which draw such throngs of people to witness our football games.

We understand fairly well the impulses which determine a

man to work for bread or steal it, to scramble for money, fortune, social position, the favor of woman; but what is the motive which prompts the English workman to spend fifty-five minutes of his precious noon recess in watching a local football game, devoting five minutes to his dinner? Or why does the busy professional man, leaving his office, journey a hundred miles to see an intercollegiate match lasting an hour and a half? At a recent Minnesota-Wisconsin game, fourteen thousand spectators from all parts of the Northwest watched the game. At the Yale-Princeton and Yale-Harvard games in late years, there have been sixty or seventy-five thousand spectators present. At the international football match at Glasgow, in 1902, there were, according to the press reports, seventy thousand people on the grounds. Moreover, a great crowd gathered without the gates and, unable to gain admittance, broke down the barriers, leading to a panic in which twenty-one persons were killed, and two hundred and fifty seriously injured. The game proceeded, however. A writer in the *Nineteenth Century* for October, 1892, says, "thrice during the last season, the writer witnessed matches in violent snow storms; and in one of these, with snow and slush ankle deep on the ground, the downfall was so severe that a layer of more than an inch of snow accumulated on the shoulders and hats of the enthusiasts, who were packed so closely together that they could not move to disencumber themselves."

How shall we explain the peculiar fascination of this game? It is not due to intercollegiate or international rivalry, for other intercollegiate contests such as debates or contests in oratory, which are more in accord with the purpose of the institutions they represent, may perhaps after persistent advertising gather five hundred people at twenty-five cents admission; nor may it be explained as a fad which for the moment engrosses the attention of the crowd, for football has been played in England since the thirteenth century. From the fourteenth to the seventeenth centuries, it flourished under the most bitter opposition, repressed neither by the proclamations of the kings nor by the frowns of the nobility. In those days it was a game of the people, played through the streets, in a very rough-and-tumble fashion, but there was some strange

fascination about it overcoming all opposition. The Puritans, indeed, succeeded in stifling the game; but its history in England in the century just closed shows how it flourishes when freed from all opposition. Despite the Englishman's loyalty to cricket, his national game, football has swept the country with a virulence unknown even in America.

Evidently there is some great force, psychological or sociological, at work here which science has not yet investigated. To be sure we have had lately a psychology of play. Herbert Spencer considered it not without importance to ask why children play, and more recently Dr. Groos has given us his two suggestive books on the play of animals and man.

Why, then, do children play, and why do their plays take the forms of tag, hide-and-seek, ball, marbles, tops and kites? Why do grown-ups play and why do their plays, or sports as we call them, take the forms of hunting, fishing, yachting, horse-racing, baseball, football, cricket, tennis, golf, billiards, dancing, fencing and prize-fighting? In particular, why do some of these sports, such as football, baseball or horse-racing, appeal so much more powerfully to the people than others, such as hockey, croquet or checkers? To many it may appear that these questions are unanswerable, or that they are matters of course, just as once was said about eclipses or gravitation. The psychologist, however, must assume that they are answerable, at least theoretically. The play of children is no longer regarded as a meaningless way of passing time. Not only play itself, but every special form of it, has just as much meaning in relation to the life history of the race as has any bone or muscle of the body.

The familiar Schiller-Spencer theory of play, explains it as due to the expenditure of surplus energy. The frisking colt, frolicking kitten, or romping girl is working off surplus nervous energy in activities not directed to any serious end, but serving nevertheless to give needed exercise to growing muscles. Dr. Groos has subjected this theory to a rigorous criticism and found it wanting. His own theory, now well known, is the "practice and preparation theory." He believes that play is an instinct, having for the child no conscious end beyond the pleasure of it, but being in reality a discipline exer-

cising every faculty for its future serious use. Childhood, in fact, exists in order to prepare the young through play for the duties of earnest life. For instance, the Indian boy plays with the bow and arrow, so far as he is concerned merely for the pleasure of it, but in reality it is an indispensable instinct without which he could not gain the necessary practice for his later serious duties.¹

It is not the place here to enter upon a criticism of these theories. They embody a certain amount of truth, but they fail to take into account the rich anthropological meaning of play. It is only from the standpoint of anthropology that the plays of children or the sports of men can be understood. The comparison of children's and adults' plays with the activities of primitive man throws a flood of light at once on the whole subject. Haddon, for instance, has made a painstaking study of the history of the kite and the top. Kite-flying is found to be an almost universal and very ancient custom, being traced back to the primitive Indonesian people among whom it was probably a religious ceremony, the kite being a symbol of the soul. Tylor gives a long list of children's games which he shows to be merely survivals of divinatory and other practices of early savage man, such for instance as casting lots, throwing dice, games of forfeits and games with common playing cards. The mental habits of our ancestors survive also in the charms and talismans and familiar superstitions of children. One recalls the magic formula used by Tom Sawyer for driving away warts: "You got to go by yourself to the middle of the woods, where you know there's a spunk-water stump, and just as it's midnight you back up against the stump and jam your hand in and say:

Barley-corn, barley-corn, injun-meal shorts,
Spunk-water, spunk-water, swallow these warts,

and then walk away quick eleven steps, with your eyes shut, and then turn around three times and walk home without

¹Consult also Wundt's theory that human play "at least in its simpler forms,—*e. g.*, in the play of children,—is merely an imitation of the actions of every-day life stripped of its original purpose, and resulting in pleasurable emotion." *Lectures on Human and Animal Psychology*. London, 1894. Lecture XXIV, Section II, p. 357.

speaking to anybody. Because if you speak the charm's busted." According to Bolton, the counting-out rhymes of children are survivals of the practice of sorcery. It is possible that marbles, jackstones and ball all have some connection with early religious rites. The punctual seasonal return of these games adds force to this suggestion. The peculiar fascination of the ball, almost the first plaything of the child, and persisting in one-old cat, baseball, football, roley poley, cricket, croquet, tennis, hockey, lacrosse, polo, basketball, billiards, bowling, golf, pingpong, and many other games, can hardly be explained except on anthropological grounds.

The younger the child, the older the racial epoch represented by his mental habits. These are often echoes from the remote past recalling the life of the cave, the forest and the stream. The instinct exhibited in infancy, as well as in boyhood, to climb stairs, ladders, trees, lamp-posts, anything, is an echo of forest life; the hide-and-seek games which appeal so powerfully even to the youngest children are unconscious reminiscences of the cave life of our ancestors, or at least of some mode of existence in which concealment from enemies, whether human or animal, was the condition of survival; while the instinct of infants to gravitate towards the nearest pond or puddle, the wading, swimming, fishing, boating proclivities of every youngster, point back unmistakably to a time when our fathers lived near and by means of the water.

Again, the ancient life of pursuit and capture persists upon every playground in the familiar games of tag, blackman, pull-away, and a hundred others. Indeed, for the exhibition of this instinct, no organized game is necessary. Sudden playful pursuit and flight are seen wherever children are assembled. The ancient life of personal combat is mirrored in the plays of children in mimic fighting and wrestling. The passion of every boy for the bow and arrow, sling, sling-shot, gun, or anything that will shoot, is merely the persistence of deep-rooted race habits, formed during ages of subsistence by these means.

There was a period in the history of man when he lived in close relation with and dependence upon wild and domestic animals. The horse and the dog have even until recent times held a particularly prominent place in the development of

human culture. This period is reflected in many forms in the child's life: his nursery tales are largely animal tales; his first picture book is an animal book; his first words are often names of animals; his toys are mimic animals, and many of his plays are animal plays. The former dependence of man upon the horse is seen in the instinct of the child of to-day to play horse and to ride a rocking horse, or in default of this a stick or stair rail. The musical instruments of the child are not those of to-day but of former ages. Anthropologists tell us that the first musical instrument was the rattle, formed by enclosing pebbles or small stones in a sack made of skins, and that after this followed the drum and the horn. These are the first instruments of children.

These illustrations could be multiplied indefinitely. They show the inadequacy of the Groos or Spencer theories of play, for none of the plays of this class have much to do in preparing the child for the life of to-day, or in giving him special practice for his future work. We ourselves are so much slaves of the past in our habits of thought that we do not easily realize how far from the actual life of the present is this play-life of the child. The real world of to-day is that of the laboratory, the school, the library, the bank, the office, the shop, the street, the factory, the farm and the railroad. Notwithstanding the child's strong imitative bent, his world, as shown in his tales, his dreams and the plays he loves best, is that of the forest, the stream, the camp, the cave, the hunting ground and the battlefield.

But what is the explanation of this evident and striking parallelism between the plays of children and the serious life of primitive man? To use a biological term, it is known that the child 'recapitulates' the life history of the race. Just why he does so, biologists are not able to say; but the evidences, particularly in embryology, are striking enough. So far as concerns the plays of children, the explanation may not be far to seek. If we look upon the history of man as a development of the will, as an advance by means of effort, attention and concentration, it is easy to see that these later and more difficult achievements are ill-fitted to the immature child. He must, to be sure, be physically and mentally active, but his activity

will be along the lines of least effort, that is, of old race habits. The child is "the heir of all the ages" and inherits at birth the old time-worn brain-paths whose use makes little draft upon his easily fatigued nerve centres. By and by he will have to check these primitive tendencies, and by education and effort to bring the newer and higher centres into use. So without will, effort or fatigue, he follows the manner of life of his savage or half-savage ancestors.

From the vantage ground thus gained in the study of children's play, is it possible to explain the psychology of adult sport in general and of football in particular?

Obviously none of the theories of play hitherto proposed will apply to the sports of grown up people. The intense interest in a football contest which so fascinates a crowd of men that they will sit for two hours in falling snow, certainly is not due to Spencer's "superabounding energy," nor could Groos explain it as a "practice and preparation" for life's duties. It is not, indeed, to be hoped that any one principle will be discovered explaining all forms of sport. A part of the charm of tennis and golf is no doubt due to the recreative power of exercise and fresh air after tedious confinement in an office or schoolroom; but it is obvious that exercise and fresh air will not explain the fascination of football, baseball and horse-racing to the spectators, nor the attractiveness of the circus and amphitheatre to the ancient Romans. Other special sources of pleasure might again be found in other pastimes, such as dancing, skating, riding, driving, bicycling, or in the diversions of the modern theatre and opera, but none of these sources will explain why a football game will bring together fifty thousand people, while a baseball game attracts but ten or twenty thousand, and the most world-renowned singer, actor or musician scarcely as many hundred. The sports which are really most attractive to the people, as measured for instance by the space given to them in the daily press, can no more than children's plays be explained apart from anthropological grounds. Let us then make the hypothesis, for the moment certainly unverified, that adult play like that of children is reversionary, resembling the serious activities of earlier times. First, what reason is there in such an hypothesis, and secondly, how far do the facts support it?

The progress of civilization has been a slow, painful, upward striving in which the motive force has been the human will, the specialized form, it may be, of the greater cosmic will. The actual exhibition of this upward striving is what we call work. Effort and tension are its conditions. Its mental accompaniments are will and concentration. But this upward movement is not continuous or uniform. The curve of development is always broken, the steep ascents being followed by plateaus or depressions. This law no doubt holds true of cosmic, social and individual progress, in all of which lapses and relapses interrupt the forward movement. In the alternation of work and play, we have an illustration of the law as seen in miniature in the daily life of the individual. In play the mental activity must be of such a kind as to give the greatest possible relief to the higher brain centres involved in work. It is a well known law in psychology that the last mental powers developed are the first to suffer from fatigue. Play, therefore, if it is to serve the purpose of rest and recreation, will naturally involve the old time-worn brain paths and appear as the exhibition of half latent instincts. At least, this will be so far true as that those sports which involve these latent instincts will give the greatest relief from fatigue. We may expect to find, therefore, that the play of adults is in a way reversionary, recalling the serious pursuits of former days. It uses the older brain paths, allowing the newer and higher centres to rest. We may expect to find, furthermore, that in proportion as the sport is primitive, so much greater is the rest and recreative power and consequently the pleasure found in it. Genuine adult play is therefore a kind of "relapse," affording the sweet rest and abandonment peculiar to the relapse. It is a sort of unconscious reminiscence, with its own peculiar joy and delight.

It will be seen at once that the facts relating to adult play lend striking support to this theory. We still practise the same serious labors of our primitive ancestors, but we call them sports. We recall first that some form of *outing*, be it hunting, fishing, camping, or boating, is the most common kind of sport and affords the most satisfying recreation. The tired business man or college professor reverts in his vacation

to the fields, the forest, the stream, or the seaside. The tent, the gun, the rod and the canoe have not only a strange fascination for us, but a hitherto unexplained recreative power. Even when our respite is limited to a half day, we take our supper in a basket and go out to the lake or riverside and cook our eggs or boil our coffee over the campfire in quite the primitive manner, or possibly we revert for a few hours to the life of the canoe or sailboat.

The animal cult of our forefathers is seen in many forms in the sports of to-day, as in horse-racing, hunting with horses or dogs, devotion to luxurious stables, kennels, or lofts, in horse shows, dog shows, cat shows, pigeon shows, or in the mere keeping of domestic pets for pleasure. One of the most popular and exciting of all forms of sport is racing. In horse-racing and foot-racing we have the survival in the form of sport of what was once a condition of life. Mere speed of foot or horse was a quality of vital importance at one time in our history, but of little or no importance now when survival depends upon wholly different powers. So instinctively do we admire swiftness of foot, that we hardly realize how far apart it is from the actual competitive life of to-day, that of the bench and bar, the legislative hall, the office, shop, and railroad. No illustration of the persistence of ancient instincts could be better than that of the effect of a horse-race upon the spectators. The emotional disturbance is out of all proportion to the actual importance of the event before us, which is indeed almost wholly without importance in its relation to the world of to-day. There are many people who cannot even read a vivid description of a horse or chariot race, without curious chest disturbances, an index of excessive emotion.

The law that the serious activity of any social epoch is some ages in advance of the sports of that epoch is well illustrated in the circus and amphitheatre of the Romans, and in the bull fights, cock fights and prize fights of modern days. To speak only of the former, when we recall the sports of ancient Rome, we see at once that in sport we have a sociological factor of the greatest importance, and a profound psychological problem. Juvenal's phrase "bread and games" has become familiar. The popularity of any emperor was nearly proportional to his

liberality in the matter of games and spectacles. Emile Thomas says: "After the sack of Rome by Alaric, the miserable remnant of the original inhabitants and the peasants who flocked in from the environs to the number of ten thousand, loudly demanded games in the circus, which had to be celebrated among the smoking ruins." The Colosseum, whose magnificence receives a new meaning from our point of view, accommodated eighty-seven thousand people. The Circus Maximus was one of the most imposing of Roman structures. There is good authority for the statement that four hundred and eighty-five thousand spectators were in actual attendance at once upon its spectacles. The shouting could be heard in the suburbs of Rome. The upper wooden seats collapsed at one time, killing eleven hundred people. Rome had theatres, too, but the largest of these, that of Pompey, had seats for only forty thousand spectators, and despite the political interest which attached to many of the theatrical exhibitions, we must believe that the interest in the theatre was insignificant when compared with that of the amphitheatre and circus. Trajan gave a single entertainment lasting one hundred and twenty-three days.

Now what was the character of these amusements which so fascinated the Roman populace? They were horse-races, gladiatorial combats and the exhibitions and contests of wild animals. The anthropological meaning of the horse-race we have already considered. In the gladiatorial combats we see the hand-to-hand encounters of primitive man, almost as far removed from the actual work-a-day world of the Romans as it is from ours. In the display of wild animals and in their deadly combats with each other and with man, we see mirrored in Roman sports the old life of the forest and plain. The mood of the spectator at the Colosseum changes, too, to suit the character of the spectacle, and for the time he is no longer the civilized Roman of the second century but boisterous, cruel, intoxicated with the sight of blood. So strong was the craving for the old feral scenes that professional hunters were kept in the remotest parts of Asia and Africa to capture alive every species of beast to be exhibited and killed for the amusement of Rome. Eleven thousand animals were produced by

Trajan at a certain spectacle. Much has been said about the brutalizing effect of these games upon the Romans; but if we have correctly outlined the psychology of sport, we see in such games as these not a brutalizing agency, but an afterglow of brutality left behind. The modern circus, menagerie and zoological garden offer similar entertainment on a smaller scale, and appeal to the same instincts.

As a psychological problem, football would have to be considered both from the standpoint of the players and that of the spectators. The two problems are different, and it is the latter that now chiefly concerns us. If, however, we were to study football from the standpoint of the players, we should find that to some extent the Groos theory of play would apply to it. That is, we may believe that the peculiar fascination of the game for the players is due to the fact that it does indeed furnish a certain practice and preparation to the young for life's later duties. It gives training in endurance, courage, hardihood, co-operation, obedience, promptness and decision. It develops the physical powers and so indirectly lends support to the mental forces upon which the struggle for existence now turns. While these benefits are evident enough, it is doubtful whether they explain satisfactorily to any one the fascination of football for the players. To be sure, in football as it is now practised, especially in professional football, the dramatic element is predominant and the significance of the game is determined to some extent by its relation to the spectators. Thus far it ceases to be play, and becomes a form of work, the end being to win a certain number of games or to gain a certain amount of applause, fame or money. But probably no football player would be satisfied with either of these explanations. Football is in itself great sport, at any rate for young and non-professional players, and the fun is due neither to the benefits derived from the game nor to the presence of the spectators. The player himself would probably not be able to give a very satisfactory explanation of the pleasure of the game except to analyze it into the pleasures of exercise, competition, co-operation, victory and so forth. These and similar sources of pleasure are, however, present in many other games not so attractive as football; and it is evident that the peculiar attractive-

ness of football is due in some measure to the joy of rude personal encounter, face to face opposition of two hostile forces, swift flight and pursuit, kicking and catching the ball, and that the explanation of these unique pleasures must rest upon anthropological grounds. The game is more sport because the activities are more primitive. The anthropologist, moreover, discovers other primitive features in the game and will hardly admit that their presence is accidental: for instance, the bare heads and long hair; the dust and dirt and grimy faces; the Indian-like blankets worn by the players when at rest; the colored and decorated suits;¹ the primitive character of each part of the suit itself, such as the sleeveless canvas jacket, the loose moleskin or khaki trousers extending only to the knee, and the moccasin-like elk-skin shoes; the quick recovery from injuries; the possibly symbolic meaning of the ball; and finally the primitive character of the game itself, resembling as it does a scrimmage of savages.

But to the student of the psychology of sport, the peculiarly interesting problems of football relate to the game from the spectators' point of view. Whether it be work or play for the participants, it is sport pure and simple for the onlookers. The anthropological theory of play is brought into clear relief when we compare football with baseball. An analysis of the two games shows that they have many elements in common. The greater enthusiasm evoked by football must be due to qualities not present in the other game. During a recent baseball season, the writer attended a National League game at Boston. The attendance was small and the enthusiasm moderate. Sitting beside a man who looked like a veteran sport, the writer ventured to ask him why football drew larger crowds than baseball. He had evidently never thought of this question before but he said: "Well, it's only once a year. It's a college game, and [his eyes flashing and face working] well, it's for blood; it's more fun, by ———, than you can shake a stick at!" Further questioning brought out only the further

¹ The development of dress has been steadily towards plain and sombre colors. In civilized countries, men now dress almost exclusively in grays, browns, dark blues and blacks. Women and children still wear the more gorgeous raiment of primitive man.

answer: "It's a sporty game,—very sporty. As the fellow said, 'Take a prize fight and multiply it by eleven!'" In reply to the question why football draws larger crowds than baseball, a college man said: "Well, football is more dramatic,—more like a fight."

These answers accord well with the anthropological theory. In this game more than in any other, except those of the Roman amphitheatre and their modern representatives, there is reversion to aboriginal manners, and hence a more complete relapse into latent habits, more perfect rest of the higher brain centres, more thorough-going rest and recreation. The game is more brutal, that is, more primitive than others. The scene before us is the old familiar scene of ages past. The lively chases for goal, as for cover, the rude physical shock of the heavy opposing teams, and the scrimmage-like, *mêlée* character of the collisions awaken our deep-seated slumbering instincts, permit us to revel for a time in these long restricted impulses, relieve completely the strain of the will, and so serve all the conditions of recreation. The game thus acts as a sort of Aristotelian catharsis, purging our pent-up feelings and enabling us to return more placidly to the slow upward toiling.

By inner imitation the spectators themselves participate in the game and at the same time give unrestrained expression to their emotions. If at a great football game any one will watch the spectators instead of the players, he will see at once that the people before him are not his associates of the school, the library, the office, the shop, the street or the factory. The inhibition of emotional expression is the characteristic of modern civilized man. The child and the savage give free expression in voice, face, arms and body to every feeling. The spectators at an exciting football game no longer attempt to restrain emotional expression. They shout and yell, blow horns and dance, swing their arms about and stamp, throw their hats in air and snatch off their neighbors' hats, howl and gesticulate, little realizing how foreign this is to their wonted behavior or how odd it would look at their places of work. The excitement of the spectators cannot be explained by the importance of the scene before them, for, as in the case of the horse-race, it has little or no relation to the serious life

of the present; but its scenes are those which were once matters of life and death. The prevalence of gambling in connection with football as well as in horse-racing, prize fighting and other popular sports illustrates the reversion to primitive morals, accompanying the return to primitive activities.

In conclusion, it should be observed that the psychology of football and similar sports does not teach that in these games there is a return to savagery. There is a momentary return in the form of sport to the serious manners of former days in order that in the serious affairs of to-day, these manners may be the more completely left behind. The intense passion for such games is in itself an indication that they answer to some present need. This need we have already indicated in the psychology of work and play. In those countries where serious life is taken most seriously, as among the Anglo-Saxon nations, there is exhibited greater occasional abandonment to those sports which afford the greatest relief from mental tension.